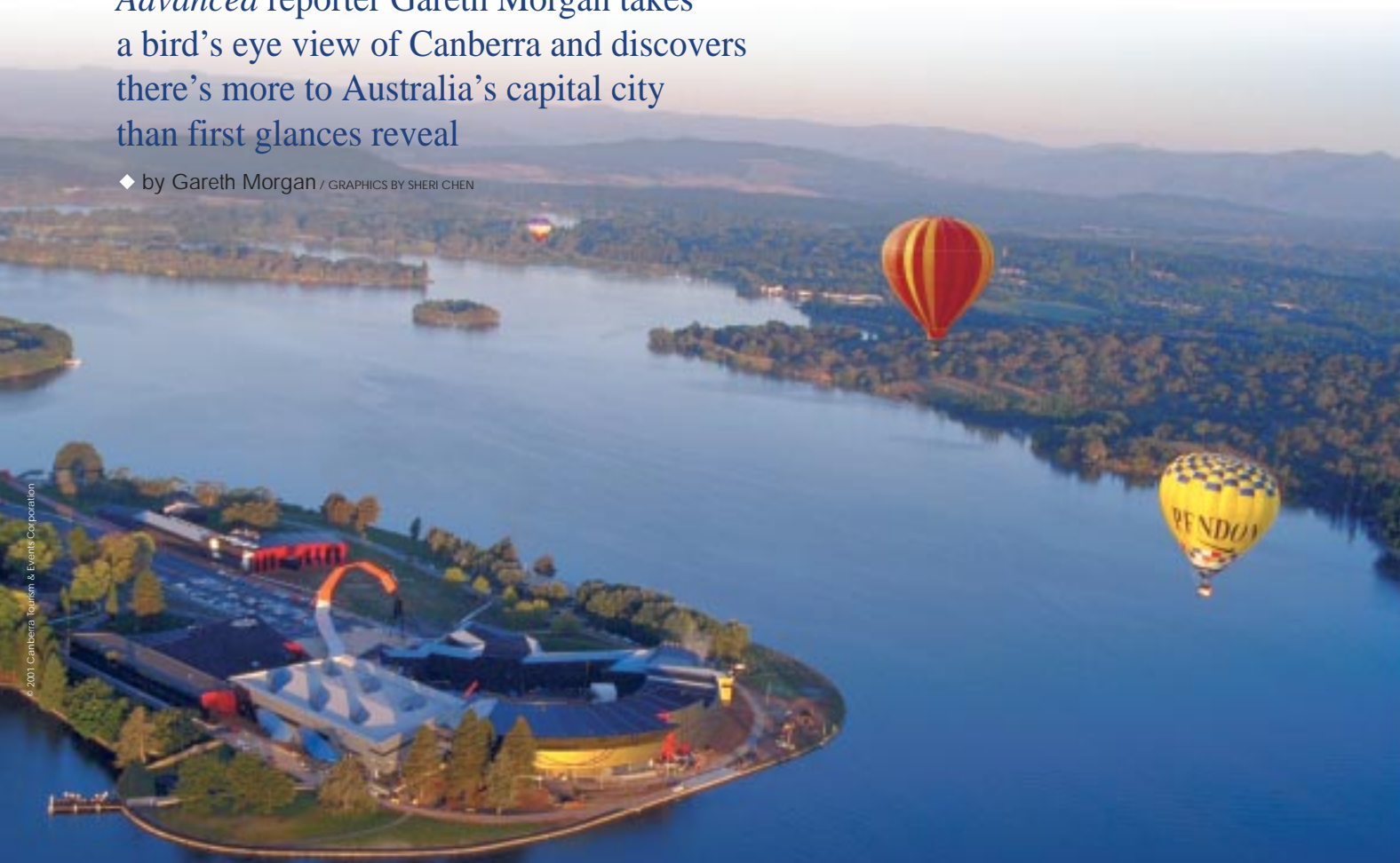


# Inside Canberra

Advanced reporter Gareth Morgan takes a bird's eye view of Canberra and discovers there's more to Australia's capital city than first glances reveal

◆ by Gareth Morgan / GRAPHICS BY SHERI CHEN



▲ Canberra's National Museum on beautiful Lake Burley Griffin

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From 300 meters (1,000 feet) up, Canberra didn't look like a city at all. Wasn't I supposed to be taking a hot air balloon ride over the capital city of Australia? Layers of trees, lakes and hills filled the **vista** before me. It looked more like a national park than the **seat of power** of the Southern



Hemisphere's largest country. But that's Canberra for you—a place that somehow evades description. Notice I didn't say defies description. Defiant doesn't seem to describe a city as refined, cultured and squeaky-clean as Canberra.

All manner of interesting places were hidden underneath and between all those trees. Our balloon flew over the recently-opened National Museum, a colorful tangle of **postmodern** architecture. We floated out over beautiful Lake Burley Griffin, the sprawling body of water bisecting the city. As the sun rose over the eastern hills, the precise, **concentric** rings of streets surrounding Capital Hill soon came into view. Parliament House itself was somewhat disguised, tucked beneath the grassy hill's peak, with entrances at each side. A parent with preschoolers might recognize it as looking much like the **Teletubby** house on a grand scale. Various other old **edifices** and manicured private gardens were revealed beneath us as we drifted silently above.

[www.balloonaloft.com](http://www.balloonaloft.com)

The sun was burning off the last of the early morning dew and fog as we touched down near a **velodrome** on the south side of the city. What a journey! A balloon ride really shows you the contrasts of Canberra. A mix



of old and new, natural and man-made, historically-rooted and forward-looking, Australia's capital has real personality.

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## A Museum of Epic Proportions

In search of more of this personality, I checked out Canberra's National Museum. Like many people, I must confess that mention of the word "museum" doesn't usually set my enthusiasm on fire. However, Canberra's National Museum is a true wonder throughout, and I highly recommend visiting.

[www.nma.gov.au](http://www.nma.gov.au)

The **mission** of this particular museum is to be not a mere display case for artifacts, but a **vehicle** for telling the story of Australia and its people. To wit, interactive displays and multimedia presentations pervade the entire complex. Visitors are encouraged to not just observe, but experience, react, play, and even to record their own stories and impressions among the various exhibits. One leaves the National Museum with a greater understanding of Australia—a country coming to terms with its **multiethnic** population, vast geography and checkered **colonial** past.



## Time to Eat!

The profusion of eating places in Canberra's tourist districts is good for visiting diners. Competition for customers stays high, thus restaurants are usually trying to outdo each other with **top-notch** service, stylish **ambiance**, better-than-expected prices and of course interesting food creations.

One can also gather a small understanding about Australian culture simply by visiting a local restaurant. Witness the recent Australian craze for **fusion cooking**. Australia itself is a

**fusion cooking**  
A cooking style that takes the best elements of various ethnic or regional cuisines to create new dishes

veritable spice rack of miscellaneous domestic and foreign ingredients, all of which mingle

and interact to form the identity of this great country. Why would Australian food be any different? In many modern Australian restaurants you can expect to come across such things as pasta dishes made with Asian vegetables and spices, Mediterranean chicken sandwiches seasoned with Indian curry, or even pizzas topped with kangaroo meat and **outback** bush berries. I

Balloons aloft!

Canberra dining

The author takes a ride on the wild side

Curious Australian coins

tried all of these on my Australia trip—they were delicious!



## A Wild Place

Canberra's orderly design, bounty of amenities and wonderful food all **lull** visitors into a sense of relaxation and comfort, like sitting down in a plush recliner that agreeably sags more than you anticipated. Nonetheless, the reminders of Australia's wild side emerge from time to time, in unexpected places. A taxi ride along Canberra's perfectly manicured boulevards offers glimpses of signposts to places with strange-sounding aboriginal names that end in "ooma" or "bidjee." During an **al fresco** meal in a fancy restaurant it's not uncommon to see and hear a wild cockatiel squawking in a nearby plane tree.

Another glimpse of Canberra's wild side comes from experiencing the increasingly popular motorcycle tours on offer to tourists. Resident Australians may consider Canberra the dry domain of politicians and lawmakers, but the friendly, leather-clad bikers I met were an entirely different breed of local. There's definitely something **incongruous** about a crew of bikers converging on a Hyatt hotel to introduce their city to a bunch of mostly non-

tattooed **greenhorn** riders. And nobody could think Canberra is a boring place after blasting down its main roads on a Harley motorcycle going 100 kilometers (60 miles) per hour.

Even the seemingly mundane act of sifting through my pocket change gave me pause to consider. From the coins in the palm of my hand, lyrebirds, echidnas, kangaroos, emus and a platypus stared back at me. How strange and bizarre these animals, this entire wild and remote country, must have seemed to the settlers who immigrated to Australia through the years. Canberra today is the tamed landscape, the civilized heart of what was once considered by snooty Europeans to be the most **benighted** land on earth. Tourists will find Canberra to be a city of style and flavor, with one foot in the past and the other stepping into tomorrow.

## Vocabulary Focus

- vista** (n) ['vɪstə] a view of a large area of beautiful scenery, especially one seen by looking between rows of trees, buildings, etc.  
**seat of power** (n phr) the place from which a government or ruler exercises rule  
**concentric** (adj) [kən'sentrɪk] of or relating to circles having the same center  
**edifice** (n) ['ɛdɪfɪs] a building or structure, especially a large one  
**mission** (n) ['mɪʃən] purpose; overall goal; reason for existing  
**vehicle** (n) ['viɪkl] a medium; a means of conveying a message  
**top-notch** (adj) ['tɒp'natʃ] having the highest quality or standard  
**ambiance** (n) ['æmbɪəns] (also ambience) the mood or atmosphere of a place  
**lull** (v) [lʌl] to make calm or sleepy  
**incongruous** (adj) [ɪn'kɒŋgrʊəs] not fitting or appropriate; not logical  
**greenhorn** (n) ['grɪn'hɔrn] a beginner; someone who lacks experience  
**benighted** (adj) [bɪ'naɪtɪd] darkened; morally or intellectually unenlightened

## More Information

- postmodern** (adj) a style of building, painting, writing, etc. developed in the 20th century as a reaction against modernism  
**Teletubby** (n) any of the characters in a certain children's television program, who live under a grassy hill  
**velodrome** (n) an arena with a banked oval track for bicycle and motorcycle racing  
**multiethnic** (adj) of, relating to, or including several ethnic groups  
**colonial** (adj) relating to the control of countries or lands by a more powerful distant country  
**outback** (n) the Australian countryside, far away from cities, where few people live  
**al fresco** (adj phr) in the open air; outdoors



Australian cockatiel